

Coins

Are all those pretty medals just junk?

By Roger Boye

TO MANY old time [some might say old fashioned] coin collectors, the hundreds of medals produced annually by private mints in the United States are little more than junk.

"All they are worth is their metal content," said one Chicago area coin dealer. "When a medal comes in here, I just weigh it and send it out as junk metal."

To many collectors who buy these widely advertised medals produced by as many as 15 private mints, the medals appear [sometimes deceptively] to be a good investment.

"I was intrigued when I saw ads touting commemorative medals that look like coins," said a retired bookkeeper from Miami, quoted in a Knight News Service article. When the woman de-

cided to sell the medals she had spent about \$1,500 to buy, she contacted every coin dealer in the Miami Yellow Pages. No one was interested.

"Some of them even laughed at me. They said they didn't buy medals because they couldn't sell them," she said.

But to other medal collectors, the products of private mints are purchased primarily as art objects, not so much for investment.

Whether a medal is an art object worth collecting depends on individual tastes. But no matter how beautiful the design, medals produced by private mints are not coins. They cannot be spent in neighborhood stores.

And, generally speaking, medals cannot be sold easily. Many coin dealers will not buy medals. Few "medals wanted" advertisements

appear in numismatic periodicals.

At the least, a collector wanting to sell medals must not be in a hurry. If a collection must be sold quickly, the money invested likely will never be recovered.

If a dealer buys a medal for the value of the metal content, the collector will not recover all of the initial price paid to the issuing company.

For example there is a medal to be issued in April honoring Pablo Casals, the renowned musician who died in 1973. The medal will be sold by the International Numismatic Agency of New York in gold-plated bronze and silver called gold vermeil.

The company will try to sell, in addition to the bronze and gold-plated medals, 750 specimens containing five ounces of silver. The "introductory price" is \$75, about

three times the value of the silver in the medal.

The extra \$50 goes to the company for design, production, overhead, advertising, and, of course, profit.

Incidentally, the Casals medal can be ordered by writing the agency at 225 Lafayette St., New York City, N. Y. 10012.

Some medals do prove to be good investments. For example, a medal might become popular [and in demand] because of an exquisite design. Or a medal might honor an event or person that catches the public fancy.

Private mints deny their medals have little resale value. One private mint executive recently was quoted as saying about a third of its products have gone up in value, a third have stayed the same, and the other third have dropped below the original issuing price.